

## **Press Release:** Hakhel Communities Incubator Evaluation Report, Year 1

A new study of millennials from 51 communities mainly in North America and Europe reveals that disengagement with traditional Jewish communal organizations like synagogues and community centers is far worse than previously documented. Only 30% expressed an interest in joining a synagogue and 7.5% were interested in the activities of Jewish Federations and their community centers. However, a whopping 84% were interested in Jewish learning and holiday/life cycle participation and nearly 70% were interested in Jewish learning.

The research, commissioned by Hakhel and conducted by the well regarded Do-Et Institute in Israel, shows that instead of joining traditional communities, millennials are participating in “intentional communities”: smaller, more informal groups which organize around mutual interest and social activism. These groups are growing rapidly and are particularly attractive to young families (adults ranging in age from 26 to 45) with children, which account for nearly 79% of their members.

The study addressed how millennials view Israel, and the results were equally alarming, according to the researchers. “The younger generation is less committed to the State of Israel,” the survey stated, and adds that “in other places, lack of knowledge and education is causing young adults to form misconceptions about Israel, which keep them away from showing interest and forming a meaningful connection.” However, the survey also identified an opportunity to reframe the discussion about Israel around shared values instead of political and/or financial support. “The organized Jewish community has been well aware of the drifting of millennials from its ranks for many years. What this research shows is the extent of that disengagement on the one hand, but also the creative alternatives that are sprouting from below on the other,” said Aharon Ariel Lavi, Founder and General Director of Hakhel, the Jewish Intentional Community Incubator, which engaged the Do-Et Institute for the survey.

“The survey has also provided us with a roadmap on how to reach millennials and it is imperative we follow it carefully,” adds Dvir Kahana, CEO of the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs, Hakhel’s key partner. According to Lavi, the silver lining in the report was the desire by millennials to learn and to be a part of Jewish learning and holiday/life cycle events. “The interest is clearly there, but the problem is connection to organized communal organizations. We were thrilled to see the high level of commitment these millennials have and what they are really telling us about how the Jewish community must be shaped in the future,” he added.

When the survey asked respondents what type of Jewish communities interested them, they identified four key areas: (1) mutual interest in a specific issue like agriculture, ecology, food and music; (2) networks for professional development or as a platform for doing good; (3) conserving a specific cultural set such as Israelis living abroad or Russian-language speakers trying to maintain a connection to their native culture; and (4) Jewish identity, as respondents said overwhelmingly that they don’t drift away from their Jewish identity but from old-fashioned institutions. The survey showed nearly 84% of respondents interested in greater Jewish learning

and holiday/lifecycle events; nearly 70% interested in Jewish education; 46% interested in Jewish arts and culture; 28% interested in social justice; and 15% interested in sustainability issues and farming.